

Written evidence submitted by Common Sense Media

LEARNINGS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM THE US

About Common Sense Media

Common Sense is an independent nonprofit organisation dedicated to helping children and families thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. Common Sense launched in the United States over 15 years ago, and has recently established a presence in the UK, where it is registered as an independent charity.

Common Sense has helped millions of families and children around the world make smart, responsible choices about the media they create and consume and the online experiences they participate in.

We are the leading organization in the United States that parents, teachers, and policymakers go to for unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all children's lives. In the UK, our ratings and reviews reach more than 3 million families through our partnership with Sky, and more than 5000 teachers are registered to use our free Digital Citizenship resources.

We have established the largest and most trusted library of age-appropriate family media ratings and reviews (30,000+ titles) covering all media types that reach 100+ million users.

Common Sense's innovative K-12 digital citizenship curriculum is currently being used in nearly 50% of U.S. schools. In the UK we are also working with the Digital Learning Division at Education Wales to translate our curriculum for Welsh students, as well as several school groups in England. We will be launching a UK version of our Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship resources in January 2021, and will launch these in Wales soon after.

Impact of COVID-19 on learning

We believe it would be useful to UK policy makers to share some perspective of how COVID-19 has affected students, teachers, and families in the United States, specifically recent polling and a study conducted this summer, which are attached as Appendices. We believe many of these challenges are also faced by students, teachers, and families in the United Kingdom.

In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inequity caused by many students being unable to access the Internet at home – known as the “homework gap.” With 50 million students at home instead of at school, America is confronting a huge equity challenge: ensuring all students and families have access to technology and broadband internet.

Two recent polls by Common Sense and Survey monkey have identified the toll distance learning is having on kids and families in the United States:

- At the beginning of the pandemic, our [SurveyMonkey poll](#) (see Appendix A) found that more than half of teens who no longer attend school in-person say they are worried about not being able to keep with their schoolwork. And four in ten haven't attended a distance learning class since in-person school was cancelled. School closures and stay-at-home orders have necessitated a shift to distance learning. But not every school district is equipped to make the switch. And not all families have access to high-speed internet or the childcare support they need. More than six in 10 teens say they are worried about falling behind academically because of the pandemic, and Latinx, Asian and other groups are particularly worried (79% and 67%, respectively).
- In a follow up to our initial research, we completed another [study with SurveyMonkey](#) (see Appendix B) that highlights the feelings of teens as they return to school this year, both in person and online. We found that 59% of teens say that they think online learning is worse than in-person learning. Forty-two percent of teens feel that "learning remotely" is their biggest academic challenge this year, followed by 37% who cited "uncertainty of the pandemic", and 32% said "emotional upheaval." Twenty seven percent of students believe unreliable internet would be their greatest challenge.

In addition, a recent Common Sense study found that many millions of students in the US are being left behind in distance learning. Common Sense Media's [recent study](#) (see Appendix C) with Boston Consulting Group found that 15 to 16 million U.S. students do not have access to technology they need to learn from home during this coronavirus pandemic. This analysis identifies students lacking basic technology for distance learning, including reliable high-speed internet, sufficient data plans, and a computer, laptop, or tablet device. We also find that while the homework gap is a problem in every single state and region, vulnerable student populations bear the greatest burden:

- 37% of rural students and 21% of urban students lack home Internet access
- 35% of Native American students, 30% of Black students, and 26% of Latinx student have inadequate Internet access at home compared to only of 18% White students
- According to Pew Research data, 35% of students from households with annual incomes below \$30,000 do not have access to high-speed Internet at home.
- No state is immune to the impact of the digital divide. In our "best connected" state 1 and 4 students don't have the internet at home. In our "worst connected" states half of all students don't have the internet at home.

The homework gap isn't just about homework anymore; lack of access to the internet and a remote learning device during the coronavirus pandemic school closures puts these students at risk of significant learning loss. The digital divide also affects our teachers. The report highlights that 300,000 to 400,000 U.S. K–12 teachers live in households without adequate internet connectivity—roughly 10% of all public school teachers—and 100,000 teachers lack adequate home computing devices. From being able to access secure school files for students, Zoom for learning, or Khan academy, teachers and students are negatively impacted by poor access and infrastructure.

We hope that the attached polls and reports provide useful data points for your examination of how Covid-19 is affecting education. Please feel free to Jenna Khanna with any questions at jkhanna@commonsense.org.

September 2020